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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 00358

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (MRN00358 VICE 00035)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/29/14

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT REQUEST CLOSER CONSULTATION ON  
IRAQ, SUPPORT FOR IMPRISONED MEDICS IN LIBYA

REF: A) SOFIA 1792 B) STAT 209883

(U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JAMES PARDW, FOR REASONS  
1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summar. Presiden Purvanov said that Bulgarian forces would remain in Iraq and asked for closer policy-level coordination, especially with regard to the redeployment of its battalion in Karbala. He urged the U.S. to maintain pressure on the Libyan regime to release the five Bulgarian medical workers imprisoned there for nearly six years. End summary.

2. (C) Bulgarian President Georgi Purvanov called the Ambassador to his office September 29 to discuss the recent public controversy over the proposed redeployment of the Bulgarian battalion in Karbala (ref A). He began by saying that Bulgaria "sticks to its word," and that its contingent will remain in Iraq. The public dust-up over the redeployment of Bulgarian troops was more about process than substance. Military commanders should make such decisions, but political leaders need to be kept informed. Unfortunately, "the Polish commander made some rash comments," which have now been clarified, according to Purvanov. The Bulgarian and Polish military authorities will work "hand-in-hand," Purvanov said, but there is a need for greater political consultation on larger policy issues, such as the redeployment of a national contingent. He asked for more information regarding the reasons for the proposed redeployment, saying that as far as he knew, the Bulgarian battalion had performed well in Karbala.

3. (C) The Ambassador responded with the points in ref B, assuring Purvanov that the U.S. valued Bulgaria's help in Iraq and had nothing but praise for the performance of Bulgarian soldiers in MNF-CS. We had planned all along to follow the military discussion with political consultations, but the military talks were reported prematurely in the press. The Ambassador added that Bulgarian liaison officers in Iraq and at CENTCOM should inform their American and Polish counterparts, as well as their Bulgarian superiors, when a military issue might require political consultations. Purvanov finished the discussion of Iraq by noting that the Bulgarian General Staff had raised several questions regarding the proposed redeployment, including whether there was a possibility of logistical or financial assistance for the move, and whether the U.S. could assist with force protection during the actual redeployment. "We may be safer in the new camp", Purvanov said, "but the process of moving will be complicated and risky."

4. (C) The second issue on Purvanov's mind was the fate of the Bulgarian medical workers imprisoned in Libya since 1999. He said there had not been much progress in resolving this issue; on the contrary, "Qadhafi was getting more self-confident," in light of the easing of sanctions by the U.S. and potentially the EU. Purvanov called for the U.S. to maintain pressure on the Libyan regime until the medical workers were released. Bulgaria would remain open to dialogue with Libya, but would not enter into direct negotiations with the families of the victims, as this would be tantamount to an admission of guilt. Bulgaria supports the EU initiative to help Libyan AIDS victims and their families.

5. (C) The Ambassador noted that the case of the Bulgarian medical workers was a main topic raised by Secretary Powell in his recent meeting with Libyan FM

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Shalgam. He also said that the U.S. was urging EU member states not to lift their arms embargo on Libya until this issue and others were resolved.